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SUBJECT: US OPTIONS IN IRAN; CHAVEZ IN SYRIA; BOLIVIAN PRESIDENT EVO
MORALES; UN PEACEKEEPING FORCE; 08/31/06; BUENOS AIRES

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Today's leading international stories include the USG's options in Iran; Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez' visit to Syria; the situation in Bolivia; and the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon.

2. OPINION PIECES AND KEY STORIES

- "Bush's three options"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (08/31) "Just like a separated couple, the US and Iran do not talk to each other. They only fight. While other countries are attempting to build bridges, the menu of choices is limited and everyone fears Washington or Tehran's next steps. The others know that they cannot intervene in the fight between the members of the couple, or else, they will not be heard.

"... The White House only has three choices available - ordering an attack against Tehran's nuclear facilities, promoting commercial sanctions, or starting a direct dialogue with Tehran...

"The US Pentagon has assessed all possible war options... However, according to the US Pentagon itself, the possibilities that this will be effective are minimal...

"Once the war option is dismissed or postponed, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice represents those who plead for a diplomatic solution, which is agreed upon with the EU, China and Russia. The problem is that Beijing and Moscow do not trust the US. They fear that, if approved, economic sanctions by the UN Security Council may not stop Iran, and could end up paving the way for a military option.

"... No one wants to talk about the third choice on the menu, the opening of a direct dialogue between the White House and Tehran... However, an increasing number of analysts and former USG Republican and Democratic officials are pleading even more for this option following the incompetence observed during the war between Israel and Hezbollah, when Rice did not want, or was unable to hold direct talks with Syria and Iran.

"Historically, threats and sanctions have been useless in terms of putting a brake on the nuclear programs of India, Pakistan or North Korea. Only when the US directly held talks with them in the '80s or '90s, did it manage to order to postpone their entry in the club of nations having nuclear bombs. Perhaps, it is time for Bush to visit Tehran."

- "Chavez annoys the US from Syria"

Business-financial "Ambito Financiero" reports (08/31) "In what is perhaps his most controversial visit, in addition to his visit to Iran, Hugo Chavez met yesterday with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and the two of them showed their willingness to join efforts in their confrontation with the US.

"On the first day of Chavez's official visit to Syria, the Venezuelan president asserted that the two presidents agreed to reject 'US attacks against Syria and Venezuela and its pressure on them.' The controversial Venezuelan president explained that they also agreed to reject any attempt to 'undermine the sovereignty of other countries.'

"Chavez used a good deal of his time to criticize Israel's intervention in the region, he asked Israel to 'return the Golan Heights to Syria,' and described the occupation of the area as 'clear theft under the nose of the international community.'

"In his most irritating statement of the day, he said 'currently, Israel reminds us of Nazism.'

"The Venezuelan president also asked the Olmert administration to lift the blockade on Lebanon and withdraw its troops from the neighboring country and the Palestinian territories.

"... While the US has officially said that Chavez is free to travel wherever he wants, this visit has deeply irritated the White House, which sees how Caracas builds close ties with countries that are seriously suspected of fostering terrorism."

- "Only a wake-up call"

Fernando Halperin, international analyst of daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (08/31) "Has the honeymoon between President Evo Morales and Bolivian society ended? Is the Bolivian scenario of recent days, with social protest demonstrations, announcing the

beginning of the end of the Socialist president?

"No. According to three political analysts consulted by 'La Nacion,' the scenario is a wake-up call for the government, but it is different from those bloody days of 2003 when Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada was removed, or from 2005 protest demonstrations, which overthrew the Mesa administration.

"... According to analysts, the real current battle is not in the framework of protest demonstrations and strikes but the debate of the future Constitution."

13. EDITORIALS

- "Difficulties met by the UN Peacekeeping Force"

Leading "Clarín" editorializes (08/31) "After hard negotiations and a fragile deal reached among European countries, the UN has managed to form an International Peacekeeping force for Lebanon. It is the greatest challenge for a UN (peacekeeping) mission in recent years...

"The purpose of this force is to obtain a permanent cease fire between Israel and Hezbollah in South Lebanon - this is to say between a State and an unusual militia which is not a warring army. This increases the complex nature of the Blue Helmets' task in Lebanon...

"It is also a big challenge for the European countries..."

"Now, under the command of Italy and without the US participation, the UN Peacekeeping Force will assume a big responsibility in the region that is going through the most serious international conflict due to its regional and world implications."

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